



# PROPHETIC TIMELINESS

Lesson 1

[villagebible.church/amos](http://villagebible.church/amos)

## DEVOTIONAL

It is...not easy to tell people that they have failed to meet God's requirements and will not enjoy his blessing. How does one break the news to religious people that their good lives, deeds, behavior, and theology do not please God? How does one tell others that God will judge them for behavior they see as ethical? What is the right way of exposing deceptive theology or of undermining one's security in useless acts of worship? Such difficulties cause many not to bother addressing the issues of spiritual failures in others. This has the advantage of minimizing interpersonal conflict for the moment, but it does not change the eternal destiny of those who are not in a right relationship with God. If a person really cares about another person, will there not be some effort to point out that a problem exists, to warn that person of the dire consequences of inaction, and to convince him or her to accept a different way of thinking and acting?

The prophet Amos faced some of these issues when he was called to warn the Israelites about a great punishment God was going to bring on them because of their failures. This prosperous and strong nation would soon be defeated and sent into exile. The palaces that the rich lived in would be reduced to rubble, and a strong foreign military force would humiliate the elite troops in Israel's army. Amos called the nation back to their ancient religious traditions in the Torah and introduced new ideas that called for a transformation of the way his audience thought about God and their relationship to him.

But Amos communicated a revelation from God that was based on standards that were in conflict with the norms that many people were living by at that time. His words included criticisms of inadequate worship, misguided priorities, oppressive acts against the weak, and a lack of holiness. His messages were not given to degrade or ostracize the listeners, but to help people understand God's view of reality, to warn them of the judgment God would bring on the nation, and to cause a remnant of the people to change their behavior and turn to God. Amos wanted people to love God with all their heart and to live like God's people in his chosen land, but they would not be able to do this if they continued in their sinful ways.

...In revisiting the world of the prophets, we must try to imagine their setting so that we can relate the principles in the prophet's message to our culture and our own personal lives. What can we learn from the failures of the Israelites during these years? Do the sermons of the prophet address basic issues that people still struggle with today? Can we discover something about effective strategies for sharing the truth God gave the audiences that fail to serve him? Does the spiritual life of the prophet and his view of ministry set an example for me in some area of my ministry? What areas of thinking is God trying to transform in my life? In order to do this we must go back to the time of Amos and gain some appreciation of the world in which he lived.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Gary V. Smith, "Hosea/Amos/Micah," *The NIV Application Commentary*, p. 204-205.

# BECOME FAMILIAR WITH IT

## WHERE ARE WE?

Amos prophesied “two years before the earthquake” (Amos 1:1; see also Zechariah 14:5), just before the halfway point of the eighth century BC, during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel. Their reigns overlapped for fifteen years, from 767 BC to 753 BC.

Though he came from the southern kingdom of Judah, Amos delivered his prophecy against the northern kingdom of Israel and the surrounding nations, leading to some resistance from the prideful Israelites (Amos 7:12). Jeroboam's reign had been quite profitable for the northern kingdom, at least in a material sense. However, the moral decay that also occurred at that time counteracted any positives from the material growth.

## Why is Amos so important?

Amos was fed up. While most of the prophets interspersed redemption and restoration in their prophecies against Israel and Judah, Amos devoted only the final five verses of his prophecy for such consolation. Prior to that, God's word through Amos was directed against the privileged people of Israel, a people who had no love for their neighbor, who took advantage of others, and who only looked out for their own concerns.

More than almost any other book of Scripture, the book of Amos holds God's people accountable for their ill-treatment of others. It repeatedly points out the failure of the people to fully embrace God's idea of justice. They were selling off needy people for goods, taking advantage of the helpless, oppressing the poor, and the men were using women immorally (Amos 2:6–8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:11–12; 8:4–6). Drunk on their own economic success and intent on strengthening their financial position, the people had lost the concept of caring for one another; Amos rebuked them because he saw in that lifestyle evidence that Israel had forgotten God.

## What's the big idea?

With the people of Israel in the north enjoying an almost unparalleled time of success, God decided to call a quiet shepherd and farmer to travel from his home in the less sinful south and carry a message of judgment to the Israelites. The people in the north used Amos's status as a foreigner as an excuse to ignore his message of judgment for a multiplicity of sins.

However, while their outer lives gleamed with the rays of success, their inner lives sank into a pit of moral decay. Rather than seeking out opportunities to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly, they embraced their arrogance, idolatry, self-righteousness, and materialism. Amos communicated God's utter disdain for the hypocritical lives of His people (Amos 5:21–24). His prophecy concludes with only a brief glimpse of restoration, and even that is directed to Judah, rather than the northern kingdom of Israel (9:11–15).

## How do I apply this?

Injustice permeates our world, yet as Christians we often turn a blind eye to the suffering of others for “more important” work like praying, preaching, and teaching. But the book of Amos reminds us that those works, while unquestionably central to a believer's life, ring hollow when we don't love and serve others in our own lives. Do you find yourself falling into that trap at times—prioritizing prayer over service?

The prophecy of Amos should simplify the choices in our lives. Instead of choosing between prayer and service, the book of Amos teaches us that both are essential. God has called Christians not only to be in relationship with Him but also to be in relationships with others. For those Christians whose tendency has been to focus more on the invisible God than on His visible creation, Amos pulls us back toward the center, where both the physical and the spiritual needs of people matter in God's scheme of justice.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Chuck Swindoll, <http://www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-minor-prophets/amos>

## OPEN IT

1. Describe a time when someone initially misjudged you and then became a close friend.

## SEE IT

Take 7 minutes to watch this video from *The Bible Project* that summarizes this shockingly relevant book.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4>

## READ IT

Amos 1:1-2:3

## EXPLORE IT

2. What was Amos' occupation?
3. What did God call Amos to do? (See Amos 7:14-15)
4. How many city/nations does Amos address and what are they?

## APPLY IT

### **AMOS: WHO IS THIS GUY?**

This man's name is Amos. His name actually means “burden.” He is not a professional prophet, he's not the son of a prophet, he didn't attend a prophetic school. In fact, if you turn with me to Amos 7:14: “I was no prophet, nor was I the son of a prophet; but I was a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'” He's just a farmer, but he was God's man, who God called, with God's message—and, you know, that's how God often works. He chooses ordinary people, often who find themselves in common jobs, and He chooses those ordinary people to do extraordinary things in His kingdom and for His glory.

Often times when we think of a pastor or religious leader, we have a definite idea in our mind of what they look like, but Amos is different. He appears to be a blue-collar guy.

- 5. What is it about having a guy like Amos speak about God that makes it different from someone who might be trained for ministry?**

## APPLY IT

### **AMOS: WHO IS THIS GUY?**

This man's name is Amos. His name actually means “burden.” He is not a professional prophet, he's not the son of a prophet, he didn't attend a prophetic school. In fact, if you turn with me to Amos 7:14: “I was no prophet, nor was I the son of a prophet; but I was a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'” He's just a farmer, but he was God's man, who God called, with God's message—and, you know, that's how God often works. He chooses ordinary people, often who find themselves in common jobs, and He chooses those ordinary people to do extraordinary things in His kingdom and for His glory.

Often times when we think of a pastor or religious leader, we have a definite idea in our mind of what they look like, but Amos is different. He appears to be a blue-collar guy.

- 6. What is it about having a guy like Amos speak about God that makes it different from someone who might be trained for ministry?**

**7. What are the advantages to a trained or an untrained pastor?**

Amos mentions that the pastures where the sheep feed were drying up, which would have been a wake-up call to the nations and to Israel. Droughts are terrifying things in the ancient world because it meant starvation and death. God desired the nations to wake up to their spiritual condition.

**8. What are some things that could happen in our world today to cause people to wake up to their spiritual condition?**

**9. God appears to be judging the nations directly around Israel before setting His target on them. Why does it matter what the nations around them were doing?**

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN? “FOR THREE...EVEN FOR FOUR”**

Amos uses the expression “*for three...even for four*” that can be quite confusing. It’s a bit like when we use the term “101” to speak of a great many. We don’t mean that literally, we simply mean that there were a great many before that. Amos does something similar when he writes “*three even for four.*” Whenever an ancient author would give a number and add one more, it was meant to convey “much more than enough.”

**10. Amos spends a great deal of time talking about the injustices the nations around Israel had committed. How do you usually respond when you hear someone talking about the injustices in society today?**

**11. How might the nations Amos spoke to have responded?**

**12. Was there a possibility for repentance (cf. Jonah 3:10)?**

#### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

Sometimes the biblical authors use language that was familiar at the time but doesn't make a lot of sense today. For example, if we were to say, "The window is open" it could have meant one thing a hundred years ago and something totally different today. Language and words are fluid and meaning can be lost over time. If we were to look at what the nations were guilty of in today's language, it would be like this:

Damascus—committed war crimes against Gilead (1:3-5)

Gaza—sold people into slavery (1:6-8)

Tyre—failed to keep God's covenant (1:9-10)

Edom—committed crimes against Israel (1:11-12)

Ammon—committed war crimes against Gilead (1:13-15)

Moab—desecrated the dead (2:1-3)

**13. The Edomites “cast off all pity” (ESV) toward the Jews, while the NLT says they were “showing no mercy.” What do you think might cause a person to refuse to show mercy to another?**

- 14. Several of the nations around Israel were called out for how they treated people. What might the nations around us call us out for in how we treat people as a society?**
- 15. Moab desecrated the dead by burning their bones (Amos 2:1). Why is how we treat the dead a big deal to God? How do we treat the dead in our society? Could we be accused of the same things?**
- 16. The Jews were undoubtedly excited to hear about the judgment of the nations around them. Has there ever been a time when you felt glad about someone else's punishment? Is there ever a time that it is ok to feel this way? (See Romans 12:17-21; Revelation 6:9-10.)**
- 17. How we treat those around us is a big deal to God. Is there someone you need to treat differently this week? Who is it? What are you going to do? Share with the group.**